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SUBJECT: Oman Media Reaction: Positive on IRF Report, Critical of US  
Arab-Israeli Mediation Efforts

REF: MUSCAT 1056

11. SUMMARY: During the past week, the Omani media in editorials the chorus of praise for the Department's International Religious Freedom report that started last week (reftel); prescribed unity among the Palestinians in negotiations with Israel; and expressed increasing skepticism over the credibility of U.S. Middle East peace mediation. END SUMMARY.

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IRF Report "Embodies the Reality" of Oman  
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12. On October 29 and 31, the state Arabic daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) hailed the U.S. Department of State report on Religious Freedom, commenting that citizens and residents of Oman have long enjoyed the freedom to practice their rituals.

October 29: "Strong Omani Presence at All Levels"

"The U.S. State Department report embodies the reality of religious freedom witnessed in the Sultanate. The wise policies of His majesty the Sultanate guided Oman under the umbrella of amity, solidarity, union, and equality."

October 31: "In addition to local activities, the Sultanate of Oman plays a true role in bringing the opinions, positions and points of view together, resolving differences, supporting and expanding the scope of cooperation between brothers and friends in the Gulf and Arab region. The commendation by the U.S. Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report 2009 of the religious freedom enjoyed by Omani citizens and residents is significant and many around the world, including our friends in the West, are now recognizing the depth and breadth of freedoms as provided by the 1996 Omani Basic Law."

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Unity a Must for Successful Negotiations with Israel  
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¶3. On October 25, Private Arabic daily "Al Watan" (circulation 42,000) called the Palestinians to unify their position in order to negotiate in the best interest of their people in an editorial entitled "Preoccupation with the prize Brings Defeat":

"Psychological warfare is one method the Israelis are using to weaken Palestinian will, by giving the impression that they do not yet have a unified leadership that can sit down at the negotiating table. Therefore, any Palestinian division on any issue, and any increase in conflict between the Palestinian factions, will be considered a victory for Israel. The higher interest of the Palestinian people is in their solidarity, unity, and resistance to factions."

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Losing Credibility On the Road to Peace  
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¶4. On November 1, "Al-Watan" accused the current U.S. administration of not fulfilling promises or implementing strategies to support peace negotiations and thereby losing creditability. "The peace process and the lack of U.S. creditability":

"Signs of a lack of credibility among the mediators' in the Middle East increase daily, and despite the hype and buzz surrounding the commitment to peace, positions on settlements and solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Hope has grown since the change of the U.S. administration and Barack Obama's impressive words on peace and coexistence between religions. However, it seems that Zionist pressure groups were stronger and more capable of controlling U.S. mediation in the peace process. All hopes in Obama's progressive ideas have faded out and evaporated, and instead of pressuring Israel to stop building more settlements, it put more pressure on the Palestinians, mirroring a situation that existed in the previous U.S. administration. "  
Schmierer